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SUBJECT: TURKMAN BLOC ENDS BOYCOTT OF KIRKUK PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

REF: A. ANKARA 971 AND PREVIOUS (GOT KIRKUK ELECTION PROPOSAL)

- 1B. BAGHDAD 1451 (TURKEY-KRG TALKS)
- 1C. BAGHDAD 756 (NEGOTIATIONS TO END BOYCOTT STALL)
- 1D. BAGHDAD 661 (NEGOTIATIONS AND ALI MEHDI)
- 1E. BAGHDAD 660 (KURDISH VIEW OF NEGOTIATIONS)

Classified By: Kirkuk PRT Leader Howard Keegan for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

This is a Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

11. (C) Summary: The Iraqi Turkman Front (ITF)-led Turkman bloc officially ended its seventeen month-long boycott of the Kirkuk Provincial Council (KPC) by returning to the regularly-scheduled KPC session on May 20. Eight of the nine Turkman bloc members returned on May 20 while the ninth member had previously broken ranks by returning on May 6. The return of the Turkman bloc, together with the end of the Arab bloc's boycott facilitated by PRT Kirkuk on December 2, 2007, means that all Provincial Council members are now attending KPC sessions for the first time since December 2006. The Turkman bloc plans to continue negotiating for its power-sharing agenda, but it will now do so from within the Council. The bloc's return is a step forward for local reconciliation between the three major Kirkuk communities -- Kurd, Sunni Arab and Turkmen -- that has positive implications for Kirkuk's governance. The timing is a welcome development as UNAMI is readying to move forward over the summer with proposals to the GOI on disputed territories and status of Kirkuk. End Summary.

12. (C) The ITF-led Turkman bloc officially ended its seventeen month-long boycott of the Kirkuk Provincial Council by joining the regularly-scheduled KPC session on May 20. Eight of the nine members returned on May 20, while the ninth member, Najat Hussein, broke ranks with the Turkman bloc and returned on May 6. The Turkman bloc's self-proclaimed spokesperson and lead negotiator, Ali Mehdi (Turkman Eli Party) also made a televised announcement of the bloc's return.

Why End Boycott Now?

13. (S) Reasons for the Turkman bloc to end their boycott at this time likely included:

-- pressure by the U.S. and Turkey for the Turkman bloc to end their boycott and return to the KPC. During her December 18 trip to Kirkuk that included a roundtable meeting with all members of the Provincial Council, including the entire boycotting Turkman bloc, the Secretary asked the Turkman bloc three times to return to the PC. Daily efforts by the PRT were also supplemented by the Ambassador, Senior Advisors Krajeski and Pearce, S/I Satterfield and Coalition engagements with both local interlocutors and outside actors, such as GOT officials. After initially instructing the Turkman bloc to return to the KPC during the bloc's January trip to Ankara, the GOT upped the pressure recently during

visits by Turkish Special Envoy Ozcelik (refs A and B).

-- the approach of provincial elections in 2008 and the fact that the Turkman bloc does not want to find itself on the margins of provincial government while campaigning for votes.

-- the fact that the Kurdish-dominated Kurdish Brotherhood List (KBL) and the Arab bloc were proceeding with the nominations to form the Kirkuk City Council, even without Turkman bloc participation. The majority of Turkmans in Kirkuk Province are urban and the Kirkuk City Council (technically it's a District Council representing Kirkuk City and the Sub-Districts of Kirkuk District) is extremely important for the Turkman people.

-- the fissures in the ranks of the Turkmen bloc, marked by one member's decision to abandon the boycott and return to the KPC on May 6, public proof of the rising frustration among the bloc members at Ali Mehdi's self-proclaimed leadership and the bloc's lack of achievements during the 17-month boycott.

Turkman Spokesperson Presents New Proposals

¶4. (S) During a televised announcement just before the KPC session, Ali Mehdi (Turkman Eli Party), the self-proclaimed spokesperson and lead negotiator for the bloc (ref D), announced the return of the Turkman bloc, citing the need to "serve all Kirkuk people." Medhi indicated that they would now work from within the KPC to achieve the following points, which vary considerably from the "demands" the Turkman bloc

BAGHDAD 00001602 002 OF 003

were seeking just weeks ago (refs C, D, E):

-- "The Turkmen should have equal share (in number and by type) of positions in the provincial administration as the other ethnic groups." PRT Note: This refers to the 32 percent division of Directorates General (DG) and their staff. The PRT estimates that Turkmans have a larger representative share of staff positions than the 32 percent sought. In fact, some of the Turkman Bloc members have indicated that they view the 32 percent division as applying first and foremost to the executive levels within each DG. The Kurds have an overwhelming percentage of the leadership positions within the DGs in Kirkuk but are underrepresented at the staff levels. End PRT Note.

-- "Apply the 32% rate in the October 1 provincial elections by preparing ballot boxes in the voting centers for each ethnicity." PRT Note: This reflects Turkman aspirations for a joint administration of the province, although this is the first time it has been expressed in this manner. PRT will continue to explore this point with members of the Turkman bloc for clarification. This is probably related to the GOT proposal in ref A. End PRT Note.

-- "Apply Article 4 (Paragraph 4) of the Iraqi Constitution which states that 'the Turkmen Language is formal in the areas that have population in it' in Kirkuk and Turkman areas." PRT Note: This proposal was sent in April 2008 to Baghdad for an interpretation of Article 4 (Para 4) by the KPC (this letter was a result of action taken at a KPC meeting during which the Arab bloc members were not present.)

The Turkman bloc continues to lobby for Turkmani (in Latin script) to be added as an additional official language of Kirkuk. However, the KPC realizing that Turkman schools have already been teaching classes in Turkmani without any formal approval, added this point on the memo seeking clarification from Baghdad. End PRT Note.

-- "The position of Kirkuk Governor should be designated for the Turkman." PRT Note: This is an original demand of the Turkman bloc that would cross a redline for the Kurds if met. In past discussions with Turkman bloc members, most

indicated they would be satisfied with a Turkman Deputy Governor. However, some members within the bloc, namely Ali Mehdi, continue to overplay the influence of the Turkman population as PRT estimates Turkmen represent some 20 percent of the province's population. End PRT Note.

-- "Establish municipal departments managed by Turkmans in predominantly Turkman areas." PRT Note: This is a new Turkman proposal and PRT will seek clarification. End Note.

Comment

¶ 15. (S) The stated Turkman proposals represent more of a media ploy by the Turkman bloc in an attempt to show that the bloc has been fighting for Turkman rights. Most Turkman bloc members have indicated a high degree of anxiety at having nothing to show the Turkman people after 17 months of boycotting.

¶ 16. (S) Even while the Arab and Turkman blocs were previously boycotting, the Kurdish-dominated KBL held a quorum and was able to conduct normal day-to-day business, such as budget execution. PRT Kirkuk Team Leader initiated a strategy of facilitating formal meetings between the KBL and the two boycotting blocs (Arab and Turkman) in June 2007. It quickly became apparent that while the Arab bloc was negotiating with a genuine intent to return, the Turkman bloc instead was hardening its dilatory tactics. Most Turkman bloc members have confided with PRT officials that the Turkman bloc's return could only occur with "permission from Ankara." In fact, one of the Turkman members stated to PRT officials that the Turkish MFA instructed the Turkman bloc to end their boycott during their trip to Ankara in January 2008. Still, the bloc members did not return until several months later, which may be an indication that Ankara may not be able to simply dictate the bloc's actions. PRT Kirkuk facilitated countless meetings between the Turkman bloc and the KBL to secure their return. The Turkman bloc responded by continuously changing their "demands," with Mehdi insisting on "all or nothing."

¶ 17. (S) Privately, most members of the Turkman bloc have indicated to PRT officials that they do not subscribe to Ali Mehdi's extremist tactics and point out his strong ties with Turkey, going as far as reporting that "he's constantly on the phone with Ankara." Ali Medhi's tactic of repeatedly launching accusations at anyone who does not agree with him has only served to alienate him from the Kurdish parties. It is interesting to note that he was uncharacteristically

BAGHDAD 00001602 003 OF 003

subdued during the May 20 KPC session. He did not speak during the session and departed after only 30 minutes.

¶ 18. (S) While much remains to be done in terms of negotiating long-term power sharing arrangements in Kirkuk between communities, the bloc's return is a step forward for local reconciliation between the three major Kirkuk communities that has positive implications for Kirkuk's governance, particularly as UNAMI moves forward over the summer with proposals to the GOI on disputed territories and status of Kirkuk. End Comments

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